



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Excitement grows as the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site prepares to welcome guests at its 30th Anniversary

ATLANTA, GA -- The Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site will commemorate its 30th Anniversary on Sunday, October 10, 2010 with a community celebration, free and open to everyone. The event will take place from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and will transport guests back to the 1930s, the period when Dr. King was a young boy who learned, played and worshipped in the Auburn Avenue neighborhood.

The 30th Anniversary of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site and Preservation District marks a major milestone in the preservation, protection and interpretation of this important national resource.

“Its appeal blends historical significance with an urban environment, which makes it somewhat distinctive in the national park system,” said Judy Forte, superintendent of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site and Preservation District. “The lovingly restored homes and buildings transport visitors back through time and reconnect them with critical social and cultural events. The park and its surroundings enable people to feel the presence of Dr. King, his family and his neighbors in a special way.”

At the October 10th celebration, all attractions within the park will be open, with the exception of Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, which currently is under renovation. This celebration also will include the grand re-opening of the museum bookstore and gift shop (managed by Eastern National), which recently relocated from Historic Fire Station No.6 into one of the newly restored Birth Home block historic dwellings at 497 Auburn Avenue. Dr. Christine King-Farris and her daughter, Ms. Angela Farris-Watkins, will host book signings.

The music of the 1930s, played from vintage 78 rpm vinyl, will lead guests from one activity to the next. There will be storytellers in period attire, reprints of historic newspapers, vintage automobiles and bicycles, long-time community residents, children's games of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the opening of the latest exhibition to be featured in the D.R.E.A.M. Gallery titled “Celebrating 30 Years of Preserving the Life and Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”

Much of the current area was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1977. Then, on October 10, 1980, the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site was established by Congress. Today the site consists of more than 38 acres -- of which 13 are federally owned by the National Park Service -- and is located near downtown Atlanta. The Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site includes 67 historic buildings, most built between 1890 and 1910, while the preservation district surrounding the site includes nearly 230 historic structures. Important features of the National Historic Site include the tomb of Dr. King and Mrs. Coretta Scott King; Freedom Hall; Dr. King's Birth Home and surrounding cultural landscape; Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, currently closed for restoration; Historic Fire Station No. 6; and the National Park Service Visitor Center.

The Birth Home of Dr. King, located at 501 Auburn Avenue, will be open during the October 10th celebration. It is an excellent example of the Victorian architecture that dominated much of Atlanta's earliest suburban neighborhoods, such as the Old Fourth Ward and Inman Park.

Originally called Wheat Street, Auburn Avenue connected Peachtree Street in downtown Atlanta with what is now the Beltline two miles to the east. Legendary African-American business leaders such as Alonzo Herndon and Herman Perry established banks and insurance companies that spurred a dynamic retail and entertainment district. John Wesley Dobbs referred to the area as "Sweet Auburn" because of its hustle and bustle. Prominent churches, newspapers and service organizations anchored Auburn Avenue and made the boyhood neighborhood of Martin Luther King, Jr. a special place.

The mission of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, which is a unit of the National Park Service, as established by the park's enabling legislation is to preserve, protect and interpret for the benefit, inspiration and education of present and future generations the places where Martin Luther King, Jr. was born, where he lived, worked and worshipped, and where he is buried, while ensuring connections are made to the life and legacy of one the most influential Americans of the 20th century.